



## Representative Joe McDermott

### Committee assignments:

- Appropriations
- Education
- State Government Operations and Accountability

### District Office:

4711 44<sup>th</sup> Ave SW  
Seattle, WA 98116  
(206) 923-5475

**Email:** [mcdermott.joe@leg.wa.gov](mailto:mcdermott.joe@leg.wa.gov)

**Web Page:** <http://hdc.leg.wa.gov/members/mcdermott/>

### Olympia office:

PO Box 40600  
436A Legislative Building  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600  
(360) 786-7952

# 2006 Session Review

## 34<sup>th</sup> Legislative District

Dear Friends,

I'm happy to be back home with some great news on this year's groundbreaking and historic legislative session.

For the first time in twenty years we adjourned one day early after introducing a total of 2,204 bills and passing a string of victories for the people of Washington.

I'm proud of our accomplishments, which include a balanced state budget with almost a billion dollars in the bank, education reforms to help kids meet graduation requirements, ending discrimination in our state, and protecting our ferry service.

I can't fit everything we did into this mailing, so please contact my office if you have questions about specific legislation, and be sure to read Rep. Eileen Cody's newsletter for the scoop on this year's health care issues.

As always, I encourage you to write, call or e-mail me with your comments and ideas. It has been a pleasure serving as your state representative the last two years, and I look forward to continuing that service to you.

Sincerely,

Joe McDermott  
State Representative  
34th Legislative District

## Our ferry situation

- The ferry system had proposed 6% fare hikes for each of the next four years and annual inflation increases thereafter. This year's budget instead provides funds to limit future increases to 2.5%, after a 6% increase in 2006.
- The budget also funds state operation of the Vashon-Seattle run until other plans are in place.



- The legislature passed a bill giving King and Kitsap Counties a chance to take over the Vashon route or to expand it to include Southworth in a triangle route. To qualify for state grants, they must submit business plans by November 1, 2006, which the Governor must approve. The grants will be financed by proceeds from selling two fast foot ferries. Kitsap County may submit requests for grants on behalf of their Bremerton and Kingston runs.

# Rep. Joe McDermott • 34<sup>th</sup> District

## At long last... equal civil rights for all!

After 29 years of intense and dedicated work by legislators and civil rights groups, on January 31, 2006, in a ceremony where there were tears of joy and accomplishment, the anti-discrimination bill was signed by Gov. Chris Gregoire into Washington State law.

Mark that date, it will go down in history as the day we finally established civil-rights policy to protect all citizens from bigotry and prejudice.

The new law simply maintains that discrimination based on sexual orientation is – and should be – illegal and unacceptable. It does not give anyone special privileges; it gives everyone the same rights: under the new law it's illegal to discriminate against people in employment, housing and financial matters based on their race, creed, color, national origin, sex, marital status, disability, AND sexual orientation.

The anti-discrimination bill had the support of a diverse coalition of religious, civic, humanitarian, business, and professional organizations. Among the many companies backing this new law are Boeing, Microsoft, Starbucks, Safeco and Hewlett-Packard.

This is the year Washington became truly tolerant and proudly showed the rest of the nation – and the world – that we are fair and equal...that there are no second-class citizens in the Evergreen state.



**Rep. Joe McDermott (second from right) with colleagues watches as Gov. Chris Gregoire signs the Anti-Discrimination Bill into law**

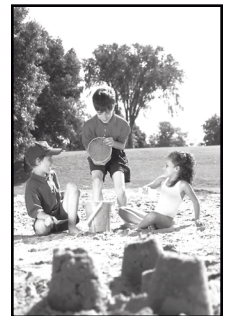
## \$2 million for school breakfasts

Last session Governor Gregoire signed a bill I introduced that required schools to provide breakfast to kids from low-income families. My bill last year was projected to feed breakfast to about 5,700 students every school day.

I have good news to report; the program has been so efficient and effective that we've gone beyond that mark:

So far we've added 8,000 kids to the school breakfast program, and this year I went further to reduce the barriers for kids to access school breakfasts and got \$2 million in the supplemental budget to:

- eliminate the current co-pay children in low-income households pay for school breakfasts;
- boost the state's per-meal reimbursement for school breakfasts; and
- increase start-up funds for programs that keep kids fed in the summertime.



## BIG savings in the budget

If putting away over \$941 million is not fiscal restraint, then I don't know what is. In writing this session's supplemental budget we limited most investments to crucial demands in education, health care, environment and economic development programs.

The money we're saving will pay off future costs, including our state's pension system. I'm confident this budget will help create stability in the future.

### Local School District

### 2006 Budget Gains

Seattle .....	\$5,141,000
Highline .....	\$1,779,000
Vashon Island .....	\$143,000

# 2006 Session Review

## From WASL to GRAD

About 84,000 students in the graduating class of 2008 will have taken the 10th grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning by the end of April. This is the first class required to pass the test to receive a high school diploma.

It was very clear to me that something needed to be done to help students meet their graduation requirements, so this session I worked to address concerns about fairness and to make certain state funding is used effectively to this end.

The WASL scores will be out by June 15, for those students that don't pass it there'll be four retake opportunities, the first is scheduled for August, and only sections not previously passed need to be retaken.

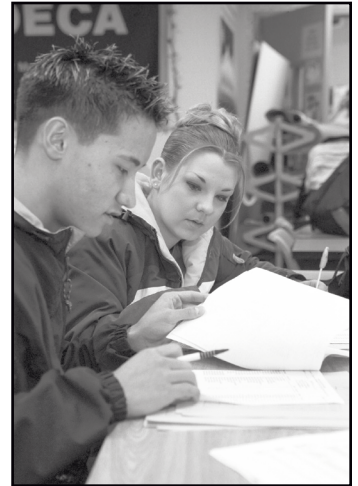
To give all students an opportunity to succeed, we put in place the following reforms:

**Learning assistance:** the budget provides \$28 million for learning assistance such as summer school programs, after school tutoring and Saturday classes.

**Alternative assessments:** Aiming to be fair to kids who don't do well on standardized tests, but know the material and can demonstrate they know it in other ways, the Legislature approved legislation to give students four alternative options to show they meet standards if they don't pass the WASL on their second attempt:

- A comparison of GPA in core classes against students in those classes that passed the WASL. If you do better than the average student that passed, you pass;
- A portfolio of work samples that shows a student's mastery of skills;
- A similar portfolio of evidence from very rigorous career and technical education programs; and
- A qualifying score from the PSAT, SAT or ACT exams to demonstrate achievement of the math standard.

Each of these assessments will measure the same standards that the WASL measures, but will be an alternative means to demonstrate the same knowledge.



## Transferring duties of the State Board of Education

Last session we reconstituted the State Board of Education with the purpose of promoting achievement of the Basic Education goals; implementing a standards-based accountability system; and providing leadership in the creation of a diverse education system.

This year the legislature passed a bill I sponsored that streamlines the Board's duties and redefines the purpose of the State Board of Education: it now includes advocacy and strategic oversight of public education and leadership, in the creation of a system that personalizes education for each student.

This new law makes the State Board of Education focus on student achievement and accountability as its primary responsibility.

## The younger kids start, the better

This session we consolidated child care and preschool programs currently scattered among many state agencies into a single Department of Early Learning that will collaborate with the K-12 school system to ensure that early learning programs prepare students for success in the classroom, and we also put in place more early intervention services for children with learning disabilities. The new Department of Early Learning will work with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Talaris Research Institute and other partners to help parents and young children benefit from early childhood education.



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## Expanding access to a brighter future

Higher education is tied very closely to economic development. Unless we want all the good jobs to go to other states or even other countries, we have to put more work into becoming truly competitive in this global economy. To do so, we must expand access to higher education so that more Washingtonians get the tools they need to compete for –and get– those good jobs.

This session we passed bills and made budget provisos that do just that. For example, we opened up 500 new slots in colleges across the state in high demand fields such as nursing, engineering, math and science; and we're funding a new program called Opportunity Grants, which will provide tuition, books, and other expenses to 400 low-income high school graduates or older adults so they can get the training they need to fill high-demand jobs.

Unfortunately not all the good bills survive, so we have to keep bringing them back every year –like we did with the civil rights bill for almost three decades, until they finally become laws and justice can be served.

This session I sponsored one such bill that I will pursue in the future. It would provide remedies for persons wrongfully convicted and imprisoned for violating state law.

Imagine spending over twenty years in prison for a crime you didn't commit. That's a long time away from family and friends, from pursuing academic or work-related goals, and from enjoying what others outside have every minute of the day: freedom. All because of a wrongful conviction... a mistake. And those twenty years will be gone forever.

If you were wrongfully convicted of a federal crime, once you're out there are statutes in place for you to claim damages. But if it was a state crime, in Washington State when you're exonerated it's your job to pick up the pieces and you have to find your own means to rebuild your life. You get no help from the state.

I believe an apology isn't enough; your absolution should include some repair to the damage done to your life. Twenty-two states already have compensation statutes that allow the wrongfully convicted to seek damage awards either through an administrative process or the courts.

My bill would add Washington State to that list. I will bring it back next year and as many years as it takes until it passes.

State Representative  
**Joe McDermott**  
 P.O. Box 40600  
 Olympia, WA 98504-0600  
 0090-0600